

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently Amended) A Neutral Tandem Network ("NTN") that provides transit traffic amongst public and private wireline and wireless carrier networks ~~servicing a metropolitan area~~, comprising:
  - at least one switch for cross-connecting each of a plurality of inputs to at least one of a plurality of outputs;
  - a plurality of tandem access points for connection to switches of a plurality of said public and private wireline and wireless carrier networks, said switches including tandem switches servicing said metropolitan area; and
  - a network connecting said tandem access points to said at least one switch.
2. (Original) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 1, wherein at least one of said tandem access points terminates incoming calls to an incumbent LEC tandem or central office.
3. (Currently Amended) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 1, further comprising a plurality of tandem trunk group access points connected to said network for connection to a plurality of trunk groups ~~servicing said metropolitan area~~.
4. (Original) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 3, wherein at least one of said tandem trunk group access points terminates incoming calls to at least one of emergency 911 services, directory assistance services, and operator services tandems.

5. (Original) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 1, wherein said at least one switch comprises a plurality of switches connected to said network so as to provide distributed switching of data amongst said plurality of tandem access points.

6. (Original) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 1, wherein said at least one switch comprises a soft switch.

7. (Original) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 6, wherein said network transmits data between said tandem access points and said soft switch as data packets.

8. (Original) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 1, wherein said network comprises fiber transport cables and a plurality of fiber terminals interconnecting said at least one switch and said plurality of tandem access points.

9. (Currently Amended) A method of providing transit traffic amongst a plurality of public and private wireline and wireless carrier networks ~~servicing a metropolitan area,~~ comprising ~~the steps of:~~

creating a distributed switching network at a higher level in a switching hierarchy including Regional Bell Operating Company (RBOC) tandems and that is independent of said plurality of public and private wireline and wireless carrier networks, said distributed switching network comprising at least one switch, a plurality of tandem access points, and a network connecting said tandem access points to said at least one switch;

connecting switches of each carrier network, said switches including tandem switches of said plurality of public and private wireline and wireless carrier networks, to at least one of said tandem access points; and

switching ~~data~~ transit traffic amongst switches of the carrier networks connected to said distributed switching network using said at least one switch.

10. (Original) A method as in claim 9, comprising the further steps of connecting a RBOC switching network to said distributed switching network and terminating traffic to said RBOC switching network.

11. (Currently Amended) A method as in claim 9, comprising the further steps of providing a plurality of tandem trunk group access points on said distributed switching network and connecting each tandem trunk group access point to a trunk group ~~servicing said metropolitan area, said trunk group~~ including at least one of an emergency 911 services tandem, a directory assistance services tandem, and an operator services tandem.

12. (Original) A method as in claim 9, comprising the further step of maintaining said distributed switching network financially and physically independent of each carrier network.

13. (Original) A method as in claim 9, wherein said switching step comprises the step of transmitting data packets from a tandem access point to said at least one switch over said network.

14. (New) A Neutral Tandem Network as in claim 1, wherein said network manages the efficient routing of transit traffic between said plurality of tandem access points and said switch.

15. (New) A method as in claim 9, comprising the step of said distributed switching network managing the efficient routing of transit traffic between said plurality of tandem access points and said switch.

16. (New) A method of switching transit traffic from a first wireline or wireless carrier network to a second wireline or wireless carrier network, comprising the steps of:

routing transit traffic in said first wireline or wireless carrier network via a first tandem access point to a switch connected to said first tandem access point by a distributed switching network at a higher level in a switching hierarchy including Regional Bell Operating Company (RBOC) tandems and that is independent of said first and second wireline or wireless carrier networks;

routing said transit traffic from said switch via said distributed switching network to a second tandem access point connected to said second wireline or wireless carrier network;  
and

switching said transit traffic between said first and second wireline or wireless carrier networks using said switch.

17. (New) A method as in claim 16, comprising the further step of said distributed switching network managing, independent of said first and second wireline or wireless carrier

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networks, the efficient routing of transit traffic between said plurality of tandem access points and said switch.